

Questions and Answers on the U.S. Second Fleet/NATO Striking Fleet Atlantic

Q1. The U.S. Second Fleet and the NATO Striking Fleet Atlantic are commanded by one U.S. Navy Vice Admiral. What are the missions of these two commands?

A1. Second Fleet/Striking Fleet is a unique organization ... an integrated U.S. and NATO joint war fighting staff embarked in an afloat headquarters, the command ship USS Mount Whitney.

Commander Striking Fleet Atlantic is assigned as an operational commander at the MSC (Major Subordinate Command) level within NATO. Striking Fleet reports to the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT). COMSTRIKFLTANT does not have permanently assigned forces, rather nations would provide their major maritime forces in times of crisis under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty to be formed into a NATO multi-national maritime force (MNMF). A newly assigned mission for this command is to be the Nucleus Headquarters for the sea-based Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) in NATO. This staff of nearly 100 officers and more than 160 enlisted personnel includes 26 multi-national officers from 11 NATO nations. We work routinely with units and commands from all NATO nations, and conduct regular major NATO exercises.

The national responsibility of Commander, U.S. Second Fleet, as one of five numbered U.S. fleets, is to exercise operational control of U.S. naval forces in the Atlantic Ocean and some adjacent waters ... an area encompassing more than 38 million square miles. We are also charged with the training and preparation of all U.S. East Coast-based naval forces for overseas deployment worldwide, including European and Middle Eastern areas.

When conducting this advanced training, the Commander is designated as Commander, Joint Task Force 950 working for the Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command. In keeping with today's military doctrine of interoperability with all of the armed services, naval forces train with forces from the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Coast Guard ... just as we would operate in real world operations. We conduct major joint exercises about three times per year, shortly before Carrier Battle Groups deploy. These exercises serve as Battle Group "graduate level" training.

Q2. Striking Fleet is also one of the designated Combined Joint Task Force Commanders for NATO operations. This notion of the CJTF is quite new in Europe. What is the vision of the CJTF concept?

A2. NATO implemented the concept of the Combined Joint Task Force to provide the alliance with a new tool, adapted in concert with the new strategic concept. While the permanent NATO command structure works well for the collective defense mission (Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty), the CJTF headquarters are designed to deal primarily with non-Article 5 operations, such as the recent peace enforcement and peace keeping missions in the Balkans. The key attribute of a CJTF is the ability to tailor forces to specific missions. There is inherent flexibility and efficiency in this approach which takes advantage of specific competencies of the various national forces.

Striking Fleet Atlantic is one of NATO's three nucleus CJTF headquarters, and is the only one on an afloat platform. It should be noted that we are a sea-based joint and combined HQ, and not a maritime HQ. The nucleus staff of about 200 is organized so that it can be quickly augmented, based upon the scale and demands of the particular mission. During exercise *Strong Resolve 98*, for example, the flagship USS Mount Whitney supported about 300 additional headquarters staff personnel.

Q3. The Second Fleet/Striking Fleet flagship, USS Mount Whitney, allows control of complex operations from the sea. What are some of the ship's special capabilities and describe what advantages are therein an afloat CJTF headquarters?

A3. USS Mount Whitney is ideally suited to serve as a multi-mission platform for COMSECONDFLT & COMSTRIKFLTANT. The ship has the most advanced Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence (C4I) systems afloat, and one of the most sophisticated tactical intelligence centers in the world. Mount Whitney provides the ability to direct joint and combined operations at the operational level. We can perform diverse post-Cold War missions by using modern communications technology, such as video teleconferencing. Aboard USS Mount Whitney, we can operate from the sea with better connectivity than most shore-based headquarters.

We use the NATO wide area network (NIDTS - NATO Initial Data Transfer System) as our common denominator.